

CONSTITUTION

AND

ADDRESS

OF THE

FEMALE ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY

OF

Chatham-Street Chapel.

NEW-YORK:

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1834.

PREAMBLE AND CONSTITUTION
OF THE
FEMALE ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY
OF CHATHAM-STREET CHAPEL.

P R E A M B L E.

WHEREAS, the system of slavery, which exists in a portion of our land, is contrary to every principle of humanity, honor, and religion; is derogatory to the character of our country abroad, and injurious to its prosperity and peace at home; and renders us obnoxious to the vengeance of the Most High.

And whereas, more than a million of our own sex are now groaning under the yoke of an insupportable and most degrading bondage, unprotected by law, or by any sense of manly shame, from merciless stripes, and cruel outrage—are subjected, by a traffic in the bodies and souls of human beings more dreadful than death, to the sudden and cruel sundering of the most sacred relations of domestic life—are deprived of the light of knowledge, and, as far as the power of their oppressor extends, of the hopes of the blessed Gospel.

And whereas, the demoralizing influence of this atrocious system, by inducing women to sanction, and even voluntarily to practice its barbarities, often renders her more deeply guilty than when she is its involuntary victim.

And whereas, an enlightened and Christian public sentiment alone is, under God, likely to abolish this most atrocious and complicated system of iniquity, and thus to avert from our country the impending judgments of the Almighty.

And whereas, female influence is calculated to effect great good in such a cause, as has been abundantly shown in the abolition of British colonial slavery.

WE, THEREFORE, in behalf of the suffering and the dumb, desiring to exercise towards both the oppressor and the oppressed, the spirit of Christian benevolence; and imploring the Father of all Mercies for his guidance and aid, in our efforts to subserve his will in this most holy cause, do agree to form ourselves into a Society, to be governed by the following Constitution.

CONSTITUTION.

ARTICLE I.

This Society shall be called the "FEMALE ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY OF CHATHAM-STREET CHAPEL," auxiliary to the "American Anti-Slavery Society."

ARTICLE II.

The objects of this Society shall be, 1. To aid in the diffusion of information on the subject of slavery; to portray its true character; to prove its utter indefensibleness, on any principle of religion, justice, expediency, or duty.

2. To promote the ELEVATION of the colored people of our own country to the equal enjoyment with ourselves, of those rights and privileges, which have been esteemed by all civilized and Christian nations as inalienable, and the birthright of man.

3. To aid, in general, the "American Anti-Slavery Society" in its benevolent objects, and with funds.

ARTICLE III.

Any female (not a slaveholder) approving of the principles of this Society, and contributing annually one dollar, shall be a member, and entitled to vote in its meetings. Any person contributing the sum of twenty-five dollars will be entitled to life membership.

ARTICLE IV.

The officers of this Society shall be a First and Second Directress, Secretary, Treasurer, and a Board of Managers, composed of ten

of the members of the Society. They shall be elected at the annual meeting, and five shall constitute a quorum.

ARTICLE V.

The Board shall enact their own by-laws, fill vacancies in their own body, employ agents, determine their compensation, direct the Treasurer in the application of all monies, and call special meetings of the Society. They shall make an annual report of their proceedings; the income, expenditures, and funds of the Society; shall hold stated meetings, and adopt the most efficient measures to promote the objects of the Society.

ARTICLE VI.

The First Directress shall preside at all meetings of the Society, or in her absence the Second, or in the absence of both a Directress, pro tem., shall be chosen. The Secretary shall conduct the correspondence of the Society, notify all meetings of the Society and of the Board of Managers, and shall keep records of the same. The Treasurer shall collect all subscriptions, make payments at the direction of the Board, and present a written account to accompany the annual report.

ARTICLE VII.

The annual meeting of the Society shall be held each year at the time and place directed by the Board; when the account of the Treasurer shall be presented, the annual report read, addresses delivered, the officers chosen, and the necessary business transacted.

ARTICLE VIII.

The Constitution may be amended at any annual meeting, by the voice of two-thirds of the members present: Provided, the proposed amendments have been first submitted to the Board in writing.

OFFICERS.

First Directress,

Mrs. WILLIAM GREEN, Jr., 17 City Hall Place.

Second Directress,

Mrs. SARAH BROWN, 113 Grand-street.

Secretary,

Miss D. W. BELL, 17 City Hall Place.

Treasurer,

Mrs. ELITHA C. BISHOP, 109 Leonard-street.

ADDRESS

OF THE

FEMALE ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY OF CHATHAM-STREET CHAPEL.

WE are grieved to see that some, who seem to think that every body must use *their* medium for seeing things, regard the members of Female Anti-Slavery Societies as meddling with politics. They try to put us to shame, by holding us up to ridicule and scorn, for aspiring, as they say, to the place, and assuming the responsibilities, of statesmen. If, thus assailed, we blush at any time, it is not for ourselves but for our poor accusers. Empty charges, however grave and oft repeated, we have learned to estimate according to their worth—"Laid in the balances they are," we are sure, "altogether lighter than vanity." We remember that the best friends of God and man, and in their best endeavors to raise fallen humanity from the dust, have been charged with political designs. What else led Pilate to consent to the murder of our Savior? And his female friends, who with heavy hearts followed him to Calvary, very probably were ridiculed for meddling

with politics. We are sure they might have been, as justly as ourselves. Till we see good reasons for condemning them for refreshing the broken heart of Jesus, by their sympathy and aid, we shall exult in the privilege of succouring our Savior in the person of his oppressed poor. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Whatever else it may be, slaveholding must be eminently *a domestic evil*. It works its mischiefs among the sweet charities which naturally flourish in the family circle. Upon all the relations that belong to that circle, it wages war—and with deadly effect. Can it be pretended that here is ground in which *woman* has no interest? Why, it is the ground on which she naturally moves—where she finds the flowers and fruits which refresh, or the thorns and thistles which annoy her. **HERE SHE LIVES.** And can she be expected to look with indifference on what must blight her joys, and break her heart?

How great the evil is, of which we complain, we find it hard to say. Its magnitude exceeds our powers of description. Whatever it touches, it soils and blasts. Its victim, it drags down from a height "but little lower than the angels," to the condition of mere brutes. It has a most killing effect upon whatever pertains to his humanity. It darkens his understanding, stupifies his conscience, and corrupts his heart. This it does by depriving him of the proper means of mental and moral improvement; by bereaving him of those healthful motives and generous incitements and sweet influences, which, under the government of God, might raise him high in the scale of useful enterprize and manly virtue. Thus, by one blow, it re-

duces his body and soul to a depth of ruin almost beyond the reach of the common means of salvation. Its effect upon the natural kindred of the slave—the free people of color—is just matter of bitter lamentation. It exposes them to a prejudice, equally malignant and obstinate. Whatever may be their mental and moral worth—their noble aims and lofty aspirings—however resolute and determined their efforts to rise to their proper level—this prejudice is continually and every where starting up in their path, to hiss and bite! They have the hue of the slave; and this most of our countrymen seem to regard as a very good reason, why, in every department of human life, they should be made a degraded caste. Our hearts bleed when we think of the nameless insults, and crushing injuries, to which they are thus subjected. And then, those who take their neighbor's labor without wages, find their sin to be "a bitter thing." Their own complaints make it plain and certain, that they have a viper in their bosoms. When, and how deep, it may strike its envenomed tooth into their flesh, who can say? The effect of the giant crime, in which they choose to indulge, upon their physical and moral nature—upon their passions, habits, circumstances, and prospects—who can adequately describe? What a nest of abominations! what a chapter of horrors must not such a description force upon us! The whole republic is polluted and degraded by this monstrous vice. We are ready on our knees, and with tears, to acknowledge that the crime we confess and deplore is *national*. While one has seized his brother by the throat, another has winked at the violence and robbery; while almost all have shared in the spoils, and justified the deed! May our repentance,

and God's mercy, save us from the lightning which lurks in the lowering cloud above us!

Must we, because we are women, look on such an evil without emotion, or remonstrance! We must then resist the best tendencies and impulses, both of "nature and grace." We must in this case do violence to every thing within us, which in all other cases we are bound to cherish and encourage. Are we called to maintain such a struggle with ourselves—to keep down every thing like natural compassion, or Christian sympathy, which might stir within us? Could we succeed in such a struggle, we should sink below the level of the slave; for while others thrust him down to the condition of a brute, we should deserve a place among mere petrifications. He who could lead us into such a warfare——but we forbear.

We hope that female modesty does not require us to regard our country with indifference. We have fathers, brothers, husbands, sons. *Are we not something in, and something to, our country?* Can the nation bleed, and we be free from pain? Are we capable of thought and feeling, of kind emotion and successful action, and can we do nothing to avert, from our religious and civil institutions, the dangers to which we see them exposed?

We have already alluded to the *prejudice*, which, in the free States, annoys and afflicts the colored people. This prejudice owes its origin to the system of slaveholding; of which, it becomes in turn a broad shield, and strong defence. Nothing goes more effectually to strengthen and rivet the chain of servitude, than the negro-hatred which is cherished and avowed among ourselves. The slaveholder in this finds countenance and encouragement, "to go on in sin." He

is quite sure, that while we regard a colored skin with contempt and aversion, we can have no heart to expose and rebuke his guilt, or to labor in any way to bring him to repentance. He has no fear, that we shall sincerely care for the objects of our scorn; that we shall in good earnest try to help the men we hate. And if at any time, we venture timidly and heartlessly to utter a faint whisper of reproof, he knows that he can shut our mouths by pointing us to the usages, which among us deprave and crush our unoffending brethren. Now such a prejudice—so insane, so cruel, so mischievous, so deep a source of crime and woe—we may not cherish. We are to loathe it, abhor it, forsake it. Under whatever shape, and in whatever place it may lurk, it must be fearlessly exposed and pointedly condemned. A monster it is, stained with the “blood of the poor innocents”—it ought to be destroyed. Let us not forget, that those usages in social life, which owe their existence and prevalence to this prejudice, are especially under our control. At our rebuke, they must vanish. Our breath can dissolve the cord of cast speedily, utterly, for ever. A cheering word, a cordial smile from us, would at once enable our suffering brethren to surmount every obstacle, which now keeps them so far below their proper level. And must not the heart of *woman*—tender, sympathizing woman—yearn over those, who writhe under unmerited insults, which she can avert; over those, whose spirits are broken by wanton reproach, or unmerited contempt, which she can frown into conscious shame and self-loathing.

We would especially exert ourselves to elevate the character, promote the interests, and brighten the prospects

of the people of color among us, by doing what we can to give them the *means of mental and moral discipline*. In touching on this point, we wish to say plainly and emphatically, that we abhor the slander, which makes them such an ignorant and degraded cast, as to be unfit for the privileges and responsibilities with which their neighbors are entrusted. To this slander, ignorantly or malignantly circulated far and wide, in high places and low places—now in the way of open derision, and now in the way of mock mercy—they owe some of the most galling insults, and some of the heaviest woes, they are afflicted with. Far be it from us, to plead their cause as if they were beasts or outlaws. We know, and we rejoice to own, that they have their full share of solid worth and attractive virtue. To us it is equally a matter of wonder and triumph, that “peeled” and persecuted as they have been—rudely pushed away from the fountains of wisdom, human and divine, they have forced their way to such a height of intelligence and piety, of active enterprize and usefulness. We would not join hypocrisy to persecution, by *dictating* to them how they are to improve their character and prospects. *We cannot urge them, then, to seek on a foreign shore the blessings they are entitled to in their native country.* What we are grieved with, and would endeavor to remove, are *the various obstacles which hinder their approach to those fountains of wisdom, to which others have free access.* We are grieved to see our literary and religious institutions disfigured with the cord of cast. We are grieved to see the generous aspirings of genius, and the upward tendencies of mind, checked and depressed at the very entrance of the public school, by the scowl of annoyance and the finger of

scorn. Much more are we grieved to see arrangements in the house of God, in the inquiry room, and at the communion-table, which are fitted to discourage and depress those, who, convinced of sin, would find their way to the Savior. Could these obstacles be removed, we feel assured that they would certainly, and rapidly, rise to their appropriate place—by the side of their white brethren. *Thus elevated, they could hardly fail to raise all who wear the same complexion as themselves.* In different spheres of useful, honorable action, they would constrain the nation to see and acknowledge, that the hue of their skin had in no way impaired their humanity. A general sympathy would thus be awakened in the miseries of the slave, and this sympathy would dissolve the fetters in which he had been held. Why should we not, then, try to persuade the friends of human improvement kindly to invite, and eagerly to welcome, the colored American to the seat of learning and the temple of religion? Who can do so with a better grace, or with happier effect?

We think too, that we may contribute something towards correcting and purifying public sentiment by diffusing, in the circles where we move, information respecting the condition and prospects, the claims and necessities, of the enslaved. Will the story of their wrongs be less touching, when told by the lips of woman? Will their claims to compassion and assistance lose their force, when urged by female advocates? We may, as our sisters in England have done, exercise our ingenuity in giving to our arguments and appeals attractive and subduing forms. Cards, prints, and tracts, may unite their influence with various works of the needle, as describing the sufferings, and in-

dicating the rights of oppressed humanity. The pictures which adorn our parlors, and the songs and stories which animate our nurseries, may be made directly and powerfully subservient to the same object. Once set upon this end, we could readily devise a thousand ways to reach it.

We are well assured, that to give the slave his rights—to set him free from the yoke of servitude—must be greatly and every way to the advantage of all, “who are concerned.” While God reigns, a nation then, and only then, consults its true glory and happiness, when it conforms its laws and institutions to the principles of His good government. To this doctrine we must adhere, while we believe our Bible. And we know most certainly, that the slave, *as a man*, HAS A RIGHT TO BE REGARDED AS A MAN—has as strong a claim to life, liberty, and the unembarrassed pursuit of happiness, as any other child of Adam. This claim, we believe, ought to be immediately, universally, and most joyfully yielded to. The known tendencies of human nature, and multiplied, refreshing, and delightful facts, detailed in the history of Emancipation, fully confirm us in our creed. May our faith never die for want of works!

In the ground which is assumed, in the position which is taken, in the designs which are pursued, by the American Anti-Slavery Society, we have lively confidence, strong hope, and fervent joy. Never do we more exult in our relation to the stronger sex, than when they rise up to plead for the dumb, and rescue the oppressed. God forbid that we should restrain our gushing sympathies, or with-

hold such counsel, encouragement, and aid, as we can render! And we know well enough, that those who look upon the slave with fraternal love, will be the last to regard such assistance, as we offer, with scornful indifference, or lordly contempt. Amidst the labors, self-denials, persecutions, which they expect to encounter, we hope to contribute something to cheer and encourage, to quicken and succeed them.

Upon the hearts of our fellow-women, generally, we would impress such views, as we have now presented, and affectionately and earnestly implore their cordial co-operation. Will you bear with us, respected and beloved sisters, while we plead with you? O, could we give expression to the dumb eloquence of more than two millions of sufferers! And such sufferers too! Women in chains—babes in iron fetters! Neglected groans—unheeded tears—unavenged blood! Miseries unutterable, yet every day increasing! Alas, sisters, where will these things end! We may refuse to inquire, to feel, to act. But let us not forget the stirring admonition once addressed to a *woman*, in circumstances scarcely more solemn than our own: “If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall their enlargement and deliverance arise from another place; but thou, and thy father’s house shall be destroyed.” Deliverance will come to the oppressed. It may come tardily—it will come certainly. If we can see our colored sisters enslaved, insulted, abused—robbed even of their infants, around whom their heart-strings twine—and can see all this without emotion, and remonstrance, and effort——. But let us “hope for better things, though we thus speak.” Let us

hope, that you will rouse up, and put forth prompt and decisive efforts, to save the church and the nation from impending ruin. Prayer and repentance, good counsel and vigorous exertion, Heaven may bless to our salvation. Not a moment should be lost. We have slept too long already. Now is the time for united counsel, and combined action. In such a work, human sympathy and Christian feeling ; blessed angels, and *their Lord and our Savior, all, ALL ARE WITH US !*